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## Promoting healthy living in childhood: an action research

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### Abstract

The process of adapting to new technologies and urbanization causes changes in children's lives, increasing morbidities. The study objective was to promote healthy living for children from a Unit of Primary Health in Fortaleza, Brazil. This is an action research. Thirteen medical students participated in the implementation of health education workshops. The meetings were held fortnightly, with theme: Healthy Eating, Childhood Obesity, Habits of Health, Oral Health, Physical exercises, prevention of drug abuse, Violence and Accident Prevention in traffic. It was observed changes in children's behavior and lifestyle.

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### 1. Introduction

The Brazilian society is undergoing a time of change in lifestyle, mainly due to adaptation to new technologies and urbanization. Children suffer the worst consequences of these changes, which often lead to irreversible consequences in adulthood. This situation, however, causes changes in the profile of diseases affecting the

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population, from the stage where there is high prevalence of contagious diseases to a greater presence of non contagious diseases and injuries, such as hypertension and obesity, although both problems still coexist (Schramm, 2004).

In this context, it is noteworthy that health education and practice of health promotion in order to monitor these changes with the encouragement of healthy habits. This practice should be adopted in all countries because it stimulates the sharing of knowledge in the search for solutions to the problems that affect people. In this sense, it is clear how preventive actions are more advantageous than the “healing” actions, both from an economic standpoint as from an assistance one (Costa and Silva, Diniz, 2008). Thus, to promote healthy habits in childhood, some topics have been addressed in this study, such as healthy eating, childhood obesity, oral health, childhood accidents, hygiene, drug abuse, road rage and physical activity. The topics listed should be addressed in primary health care and childcare starting in adolescence.

## 2. Literature review

The new epidemiological profile interferes with the daily lives of children, as it is common today easily having access to processed foods and spending too much time watching television or at the computer than playing in the street, because of the lack of security (Mello, 2004). This can be prevented mainly through a healthy diet since the earliest years of life, a factor that contributes to maintaining these habits into adulthood (MALTA, 2010), showing the importance of awareness of the problems that can occur early, it is increasingly apparent replacement of the main meals of the day for snacks and treats (VARGAS, 2011).

Childhood obesity therefore constitutes a major public health problem (WHO, 2000). It affects about 15% of Portuguese children and is a difficult issue for parents and teachers. By joining genetic predisposition, a high calorie diet and lack of exercise are creating the conditions for obesity being installed (AMA, 2003).

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes other aspects of healthy habits and recognizes the importance of hygiene, to consider it as one of the factors that influences the health of the community. However, it states that a community can be considered healthy when the occurrence of diseases are low, when members of the community have access to basic services, when health services respond to their needs and where the community lives in a reasonable state of harmony. That way, you can maintain proper hygiene, capable of maintaining a stable state of health during physical and mental development of the child (BRAZIL, 2006).

Accidents in childhood and adolescence currently constitute a major public health problem in Brazil, especially in those over five years old. These accidents usually bring a high public cost to a nation and pain to families, being considered the first cause of mortality in children (AMARAL, 2007; ALMEIDA, 2013).

Drug use is an ancient and universal practice. In the 60s, however, this practice was a global concern, as it became common and put many people in danger (TAVARES, 2001). In Brazil, this problem is part of adolescence, and sometimes of some children who die mainly in the suburbs of large cities due to a greater contact with drugs since childhood. It is noteworthy that in addition to the many health problems, the use of illicit drugs greatly increases school dropout rates, often due to social interaction. Thus, it is essential an alert from both school and family with these behavioral changes.

From the standpoint of public health and preventive medicine, promote physical activity in childhood and adolescence means establishing a solid basis for reducing the prevalence of physical inactivity and these diseases in adulthood, thus contributing to a better quality of life. Furthermore, sport has great importance, promoting companionship, team activity and placing the child in situations of challenges where you can win or lose. (LAZOLLI, 1998).

In this context, we carried out a health education intervention in a community with underprivileged children, whose goal was to promote healthy living for children of a Unit of Primary Health Fortaleza-CE, Brazil.

### 3. Methodology

This is an account of an action research conducted in the Baptist Church Candeias, social facilities of a unit of primary health care. Participated in the implementation of health education workshops thirteen academics, the horizontal module II and III activity, entitled: Integration, Service, Education and Community, contemplated in the grid of the medical course of Christus University Center. The meetings were held fortnightly, with theme: Healthy Eating, Childhood Obesity, Habits of Health, Oral Health, Physical exercises, prevention of drug use, Accident Prevention and Traffic Safety.

In each workshop a pre-test and post-test was applied, with the aim of identifying the knowledge and learning of children.

The activity was carried out with 25 children participating in the social project "Fly Space" sponsored by the Baptist Church Candeias, Fortaleza / Ceará / Brazil, in the period of January through June of 2014.

### 4. Development Workshops for Health Education

The activity on diet was based on assessing the feeding preference of the children and then presenting healthy foods to discuss the correct intake. We used a questionnaire to verify the eating habits of children, a video informing the balanced amount of food intake, emphasizing the healthiest and then was made an educational playful game. The children were divided into groups. The game consisted of a "giant chessboard", designed with pictures of foods of different nutritional values, children were considered parts of the game, as they walked on the board, each group played the "giant given" and, according to the number obtained, the child jumped squares on the board. If the child stopped in a place filled with high calorie foods, they received warnings and information about food, if they stopped in nutritious foods earned bonus. Moreover, at a certain point of the game, each child chose a path to follow: the right, with figures of healthy foods, or left with bad eating habits, but the only path that led the child to win the game was the right, indicating a balanced diet.

The Oral Health workshop was addressed through a puppet show in which the characters grew bad oral hygiene habits, which triggered a series of negative consequences such as gingivitis, cavities and bacterial plaque. At the end of the story, it was made a debate about the problem, where children showed a very similar reality to that depicted in the play. Trying to reverse this situation, a workshop on oral health, where the children were instructed on the proper way to brush your teeth through an educational music and a lecture given by the students was developed. Furthermore, the workshop found by means of a dental arch, so as brushing must occur. Then were given a hygiene kit with which they practiced proper brushing, as the guidelines they had received.

The choice of the theme Childhood Obesity and the receipts was based on a previous diagnosis of high consumption of soft drinks and processed sweets, obtained through dietary surveys. To perform the activity, the mothers participating in the project were invited to attend the church, date and time marked. Initially, a lecture was given, which expounded on healthy eating and the importance of family in building good habits in childhood. Initially, a lecture was given, which expounded on healthy eating and the importance of family in building good habits in childhood. Then, two healthy, easy and inexpensive recipes were performed: one natural orange soda flavor and other natural banana ice cream with subsequent tasting and sensory evaluation. The recipes were printed and delivered during the workshop.

The workshop on Prevention of accidents was performed to preventing childhood neurotrauma. It was shown an educational video of the Brazilian Society of Neurosurgery, focused on children, which exposed situations that should be avoided to prevent accidents. Moreover, the organizers of the activity used balloons to demonstrate, through a game, what could happen to children's heads if they did not play safely.

In the workshop on the prevention of drug abuse, images were shown with different situations, in which each child had to paste a smiley face on the images depicting happiness and a sad face on the images they considered sad. In that first moment we discussed the perception of children for each image. Then we performed a play in which was presented the difficulties that the use of drugs requires. The children were divided into pairs, we used a die, in

which on each side contained images (figures of alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and families smiling children playing), then according to the image presented, the team would be attached to the foot of each other or not. Then each team had to run a certain distance to complete the test. It was carried out so the children could realize that drug use often make us unable to perform activities efficiently, compared with not using drugs.

## 5. Results

It was found that 12.5% of children were out of school, the socio-demographic and economic context; half of the parents had less than eight years of study, 19% of households were poor and had no formal occupation.

Regarding the post-workshop learning children, it was found: 94% of children recognize the consumption of fruits and vegetables as healthy foods, 88% recognize that soft drinks, sweets, fried foods, sauces and chocolates are harmful to health, 94% understood the need to six daily meals. 91.7% seized the importance of hand washing before and after meals, 100% know the meaning of the colors of traffic signals, 83.4% identify signs of transits, 93.7% know how to prevent accidents and 100% knows the importance of physical activity as a healthy habit.

## 6. Conclusions

People are capable of change and early identification of changing lifestyles and inadequate, its correction may interfere positively in the life of the individual. Through this study it possible to train health promoters, as well as academics with a vision of a humane practice of medicine.

After the workshops, most of the children, seized relevant information to healthy habits, thereby reducing possible damage to health and improving the quality of life for families, because they are multipliers of information within the social context in which they live. It was possible through interventions, teaching healthy practices with a focus on health promotion, and is considered extremely relevant when performed in infancy, because they have a greater impact on the prevention and treatment of health problems and health hazards.

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